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ABSTRACT

To dramatize the human resource potential of persons over 65 years old and of the disabled, oral interpretation presentations using oral histories were developed. These presentations were designed to lead to a stimulating exchange of ideas concerning the potential contribution to daily life of the elderly and of the disabled, and to pose questions regarding public policy toward these groups. Interviews were transcribed into dialog, and the scripts were read by elderly and disabled performers. Each of the two productions was performed 12 times; the program for the elderly was also broadcast on public television. These presentations dramatically illustrated the practical value of oral interpretation outside the classroom for raising awareness and influencing public policy towards the problems of the aging and the handicapped. (DF)

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USING ORAL INTERPRETATION TO AFFECT PUBLIC POLICY

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Using Oral Interpretation to Affect Public Policy

The Idea

Maryann Hartman

One of the problems for the field of oral interpretation has been establishing its practical value for students and colleagues. Our colleagues in public speaking, debate, small groups, interpersonal, organizational communication seem to easily establish the relevance of their fields to "the world" outside the classroom and, therefore, have some valuable motivation for their students and gain a larger portion of departmental funds. I have found myself stressing the lifelong value of skill at reading aloud, the need of teachers and parents to read aloud to children, the need to read minutes and resolutions with clarity and understanding to motivate my students and impress my colleagues. This strategy changed dramatically when I became involved in the successful use of oral interpretation to influence public policy through the two projects--Old Age: Tradition Shelved or Shared and As Others See Us--that we are going to share with you today.

In November of 1976, a planning committee was called together by two women representing the Maine Committee on Aging to discuss the possibility of writing a grant for the Maine Council for the Humanities and Public Policy, which is a state arm of the National Endowment for the Humanities, to dramatize the positive human resource potential of people over 65. We agreed that the basic goal of such a project was to employ people over 65 to work with humanists, artists, and public policy makers in developing an oral interpretation presentation utilizing oral histories that could result in stimulating an exchange of ideas concerning the poten-

tial contribution of the elderly to daily life and questioning public policy for the aging. The grant was funded and covered planning, staff training, recruitment, screening, group discussion, taping, scripting, rehearsal, 12 performances, and humanist responders. The audiences included The Maine Municipal Association, Legislative Committees, The Bath Center for the Performing Arts, The Maine Committee on Aging, Senior Citizens' groups, and a Junior High School. The script was adapted by Beth and Burton for television and aired over Maine Public Broadcasting. The additional financial support for the T.V. production came from the Maine Commission for the Arts and Humanities.

Because of the positive response to the aging project, Dr. JoAnn Fritsche, Director of Equal Employment Opportunity at the University of Maine at Orono, decided to submit a grant to the Council for a similar project using disabled people and centering on their problems and potential as human resources. Once again the grant was funded by the Council, with calaries for Beth and Burton and each of the performers paid by the Penobscot Consortium Training and Employment Administration (C.E.T.A.). This second project was funded for a year, whereas the aging project was funded for nine months. Some of the same people were involved in both projects. This included myself, as a member of the planning committee and a humanist responder, and Beth and Burton, as interviewers, scriptwriters, and directors.

The second project, entitled, <u>As Others See Us</u>, is in progress at the present time. The first performance was October 15, and 12 more performances are scheduled before December 1. The cast will renew its tour schedule after the first of the year

with the tour ending in May. The audiences will include: The Maine Rehabilitation Association, The Maine Municipal Association, The Penobscot Consortium Training and Employment Administration, The YMCA, Teachers' Associations, The Regional Disabilities Council, hospital staffs, The Veteran's hospital, institutions for the handicapped, and legislative committees. Each performance was or will be followed by a discussion of the issues raised by the performance between the performers, humanist responders, and audiences. A similar discussion followed the presentation of the aging script.

The primary focus of both scripts was the humanness of the performers. Although both scripts used oral histories as interpretation material and nontraditional performers, the secondary emphasis of the scripts was different. The elderly people interviewed did not use the services provided by government agencies. This coincided with the statistic that only 10% of the aging in Maine actually used such services. The script, therefore, did not deal with the agencies. The handicapped script, on the other hand, focused on the agencies--vocational rehabilitation, educational institutions, municipal governments, Supplemental Security Income--on whom the performers constantly depended. The laws, the agencies, the impending laws were an important focus of the script and the discussions.

There has been precedent for various elements that were part of the presentation. Using a dramatic presentation to persuade audiences about public policy issues ranges from Aritophanes through Satre, Brecht, and Shaw. The use of oral history as literature for oral interpretation has been used in productions of Spoon River Anthology, scripts based on Turkel's Hard Times

and Working, a recent Chicago Street Theater production, a production of "A Conversation With Grandpa" in Rhode Island, and Ann Utterbeck's "Oh, How I Love A Coal Mining Man." Using nontraditional performers seems innovative. Two recent examples using the elderly come to mind--the Chicago Street Theater Group and Will Geer's Company. I do not know of any productions that used handicapped performers.

The coming together of these elements is what made the projects unique and has been a dramatic illustration of how oral interpretation has practical value in the world outside the classroom. Our experience has established oral interpretation as a viable medium for raising awareness and influencing public policy towards the problems of the aging and the handicapped.

The Creative Process

Beth Hartman
Burton Alho

What will you do when you're their years?
With your nights, your days, your ideas?

Run for your life. This woman
would be crying and he'd
shake her and say, "Look,
I only have one year to live.
If I can take it, you can take it.

Dust the cups with the painted flowers.
Feed the cat and count the hours.

Ironside...he had a good looking
secretary.
Mr. Mago...he'd talk to a stone wall
thinking it was a person. He was
a fool...a complete fool...a joke.
He was a cartoon...a cartoon.

Slip and fall when the weather's mild.
Rock and hold an imagined child.

Tiny Tim...The Christmas Carol.
The symbol of purity. Perfect
Christ-like child...Poster Child.

Peer into a glass and regrettably see,
What time has done to the symmetry.

The Hunchback of Notre Dame.
Look how out of shape he was.

Picture a girl once called you,
Doing young things that young things do.

Mary Ingalls from a family Lassie
would like to live with,
Then there's Laura in The
Glass Menagerie

Shuffle over a braided rug,
worn thin by constant wear,
To open a door already to hug
the fact that no one's there.

The stark, lonely images of old age from the opening segment of "Old Age: Tradition Shelved or Shared," the cardboard, celluloid stereotypes of disability from the opening of "As Others See Us" consign the lives of the elderly and the disabled to obscurity. Oral history in dramatic form provided sixteen people with the opportunity to transcend obscurity and move beyond the image of dependency to affect public policy and refocus the attitudes upon which the assumption of dependency is based. Today we'd like to share with you the creative process that made this possible.

To give you a better idea of what we'll be talking about, we'd like you to listen to the following excerpts: the first from "Old Age," the second from "As Others See Us."

Excerpts from "Old Age: Tradition Shelved or Shared"

Martha: I haven't tried to do a thing - which is really, which is really appalling you know it really is. It's really scary to think of what I've done and never tried to do and what I might have done had I tried. This is really scary. And so at this point I have loads of regrets. But what I had or what I was handling at the time, I don't think it would have made any difference. I would have done just what I did. Now does that make any sense?

Mary: My husband died in '47...

Martha: Does that make any sense...

Mary: He left the house at 8:00 in the morning. He told me to call him at nine...the fifth of February, 1947.

Martha: Terrible winter.

Mary: It was five minutes of nine when I went to put the call through and as I went to dial the number I heard somebody breathe and I said, "hello." And it was Father Cayer. He said...

Lou: "Joe's dead."

Mary: It was incredible that he was gone...It took me a long time; even years after I would have dreams of him having amnesia and I was hunting for him...The company forgot the fact that my husband had worked for thirty-five years for them.

Lou: There is no pension plan.

Mary: I went looking for a job.

Lou: It is company policy not to hire anyone over thirty.

Mary: I was forced to take a selling job on straight commission. I didn't know what I was going to do.

Lou: We don't rent to widows with children.

Mary: The landlords implied that widows would be more inclined to have men in.

Excerpts from "As Others See Us"

June: Mine started after birth. They couldn't get the hot and cold water fast enough. My Aunt Cora and father met face to face in the doorway and they didn't know who was going to let the other one go first and the doctor said...

Actor: Hurry up.

June: Because he was trying to breathe for me and it was just... Sometimes I can't walk too far, because my right side gives out and I have to sit down. Sometimes, if there's too much heat, I have a muscle spasm, or if I get emotionally upset, I have a muscle spasm, but other than that my handicap is disguised and no one can understand...

Actor: What's wrong with her?

June: When I'm depressed, I go to the Psalms.

Psalm 12: For the faithful fail from among the children
of men.
They speak vanity, everyone, with his neighbor.
With flattering lips and with a double heart
do they speak.

Actor: What's wrong with her?

June: Do people notice that I have a limp? I'm supposed to have built up shoes, but they don't look like everybody else's, so I wear ordinary shoes which is cheaper. I used to wear grownup clothes...

Actor: Old ladies heels.

June: Make believe.

Actor: Honestly.

June: I had my own little world, because I couldn't communicate. I was brought up...always big people. You know, they got big problems...So I made my own little world. I was a picture I got from other people about myself. And it took me a long time to accept the handicap that I have, because it was so overwhelming.

Actor: The way people treated her.

June: But I got through it.

Molly: You're q winner, June.

June: I make it. I always like to think there are some things you can overcome.

The creative process behind each script presented us with a lot of "things to overcome," beginning with the very first phase, recruiting: locating potential participants.

For the first project, "Old Age," we interviewed 200 people. We saw a lumberman, a president of a theological seminary, a secretary, people in their nineties, people in their sixties, an indian, E. B. White's next door neighbor, the first woman delegate to represent Maine at a Republican National Convention, an entertainer, teachers, homemakers, just anyone who would talk with us.

For the project with the disabled, "As Others See Us," we had a much more difficult time locating potential participants due to the fact that the disabled, by the nature of their lives, are a less visible minority and maintain low profiles due to architectural and attitudinal barriers. We did manage to locate approximately one hundred: quadraplegics, paraplegics, blind people, deaf people, alcoholics, a burn victim, a woman with Lupis, people with MS, CP, a boy with a communication board, the mentally retarded, back injured, people with hernias, ulcers, people with emotional difficulties. We even resorted to recruiting in the streets. This is how one participant was discovered:

> I saw Mark limping down the street as I was driving by. And I said, "Oh, he's disabled. Should I stop?" And I said, "No, I couldn't. It will be too embarrassing." Stopped at the stop sign. Looked in the rear view mirror. Mark was still walking down the street. "No, I'm not going to stop. Yeah, I'm going to." I backed the car up 300 yards to where Mark was, rolled down the window and said, "I noticed you have a disability." Mark, who was carrying a six pack, thought I was hard up for a beer.

Regardless of how they were found, each potential participant received variations of the following:

> Today I would like to talk to you about your life: where you have lived and what you have done and how you have felt about your experiences. We would like to spend two months doing just this with six to ten people. We will put together a script with the words of the participants and ask them to perform it for public policy makers throughout the state. Its purpose will be to provide a catalyst for discussion about issues that affect your life. It's an unusual concept and we're not sure how it will work, but we will talk about that later. For now we would just like to talk to you about you.

No matter how clearly we described the project, we could never be sure we were thoroughly understood: "Oh, I get it. It's about getting people jobs"..."You're going to play tapes for people?" Most people, after all, have never heard of oral interpretation or oral history, never mind a combination of both.

Following each initial interview, we would exchange notes and tapes and decide if a second interview was desirable. We considered each interviewee's ability to share, not only biographical information, but also his ability to communicate his approach to living, how well he described how he had endured, made decisions, chosen a life style, and reacted to age and disability.

When we had established a list of potential participants, we compared and contrasted appearance, personality, experience, and tried to predict the impact each would have on the group. In light of these relatively objective criteria, we had to make the final subjective selections. We chose those who could stand strong individually and also provide a dramatic balance to the group. We wanted the group to reflect as wide a range of human experience and human strength as possible. Despite all the obstacles and difficulties, we had managed to discover an extraordinary array of people.

The ages of the participants in "Old Age" ranged from 60 to 82. The cast consisted of: a railroad man, two sisters with polarized attitudes towards life, a husband and wife, a Franco-American homemaker, a stone cutter, a would-be poet-homemaker, a business woman, and a free spirit who approaches life with her feet in the clouds.

For this year's project we selected: June, a twenty-six year old woman, who was born with Cerebral Palsy; Patty, a nineteen year old, deaf and inexperienced, aggressive and bright; Molly, a fifty-six year old blind, diabetic, and arthritic, who puts fear on the shelf; Jim, a thirty year old paraplegic, as a result of a car accident; Mark, a twenty-seven year old, a victim of polio when he was a year old, who considers stuttering his greatest handicap (You'll meet him on video tape later); Frank, a forty-two year old, born a hunchback with severe curvature of the spine, illiterate and alcoholic; and Vicky, in her thirties, the daughter of two deaf parents. She interprets, in sign, for Patty and for the show.

Once the cast were chosen, we began our interviewing phase. We wanted to find creative ways to stimulate expression, to create a group sense, to give everyone a chance to say something at every meeting. We wanted to make the experience enjoyable but were motivated by the constant desire for scriptable material. During the two months of interviewing to elicit a wide variety of responses, we used a wide variety of techniques: music, poetry, role playing, improvisation, film, literature, interpersonal exercises. We interviewed in small and large groups, as well as one on one; sometimes we had them interview each other.

This year we decided to interview for a longer period of time and at a greater depth. We felt compelled to interview, in addition

to the disabled participants, their family, friends, counselors, insurance people, and medical people, in order to gain an understanding of the general complications that a disability incurs. Due to our first year's experience, we were able to ask questions that were more probing.

Although our interviewing techniques were at a more sophisticated level, the difficulty and the emotional fragility of our people's lives made a controlled interview, at times, next to impossible. The two of us made the "hall of fame" for transgressing interviewing techniques.

Approaching June in her first individual interview was an unsettling experience. Her life and what we knew of it was overwhelming in its anguish and pain. We couldn't predict her emotional stability during this intense first interview. The interview got off to an uncertain start:

> Now, I've got a whole bunch of questions here, and they are all different types of questions. And some of them are easy to answer. You know the answers like that. And some of them... just take your time thinking of an answer. Just for the matter of record, where were you born?

At times response was outstanding and we knew instantly that what was being said would most likely appear in the script. What follows is the genesis of some of these lines. When we asked them to consider the most critical events of their lives, we received the intimate depiction of a husband's death, and a woman's triumph at going back to work. From the film, I Never Sang For My Father," we received the response, "I can stand pain, but I can't stand agony," a line we never used which gave us the encouragement to probe the topic of death more deeply. When we did so we received varied perceptions: fear, traumatic memories, humor, and the powerful reaction

that comes when facing one's own mortality, which provided us with the basis of a section that was to become dramatically essential to the "Old Age" script:

Bob: Now death is a different career.
Martha: There's something beautiful about dying.
Lou: It's just a sleep.
Madeline: Were you ever with anyone when they died?
Martha: Yes, my mother-in-law.
Madeline: And was it beautiful?
Martha: Yes. She left something with me. To the end I was still receiving from that woman.
Madeline: I've seen death two times and neither time was it beautiful. It's a nightmare that comes back to me still.
Fran: Everytime someone dies it brings it closer.
Mary: My father called for me to hold his hand. He slipped away. And mother said, "Close his eyes and mouth." And I said, "Mother he has to breathe." He's gone Mary. I said, "I want to leave him breathe."
Ida: I've seen death easy; I've seen death hard.
Betty: I'll take mine easy.
Ida: We've experienced a lot of death.
Martha: I'd miss the morning.
Madeline: I'd miss having a cup of tea with Ida.
Martha: I'd miss forever going around the next corner.
Ida: I want to leave with a good feeling. I'd like to clear up any hurts.
Betty: Doug, I'm frightened, aren't you?
Doug: No.

For this year's project, we read a selection from the novel Passing Strange. The excerpt dealt with a quadraplegic's desire to kill herself. We received the response: "Many times I wanted to end it all. Many, many times." And: "I'd drink twelve beers a night and the next morning wonder how I got across State Street. I felt so alone...so unlike a man."

A reading from Spoon River Anthology, in which a very short man becomes a judge, provided us with a discussion of the times when our people felt degraded and infuriated by public attitudes. The following excerpt illustrates that response. (video tape)

In both projects, the longer we worked together, the more profound our use of time, and substance was the meat of our script.

At the end of the formal interviewing, we had a formidable task ahead of us: to extract material from over one hundred hours of taped interviews in order to create scripts that developed a forty-five minute time frame, the lives of our people. Although the two of us were to have little actual "voice" in the script, we knew that our consistent views on depicting and expressing the human condition would have something to do, however, indirectly, with how our peoples' lives were introduced, developed, and represented. Despite occasional exaggeration for dramatic purposes, we have remained faithful to those lives and the events, feelings, and ideas expressed to us during the interviews.

For both scripts, every word had to have an economy. We had to carefully edit some of the longer stories without destroying the essence of what a person was saying. We also had to be sensitive to speech patterns, personal word choice and rhythm, and learn how to preserve these qualities through careful editing. With sensitive editing, lines and phrases became poetic.

After we completed the transcription of the "Old Age" interviews, we had pages of material which we categorized: marriage, children, work, dreams, and so on. Once we had categorized all the information, we considered dreams, all of their dreams, ranging from what they wanted to be as children, to what they still wanted to accomplish as adults, from an actual dream of kissing the Blarney Stone to a philosophical discussion that fluctuated between optimism and pessimism. We chose to open the script with dreams because it placed our people in a universal context: we all dream and what we dream reveals quite often the substance of who we are. Dreams alligned our people with images that were consistently developed and sup-

ported throughout the script. For instance, Mary said, "I never had time to dream. I just wanted to be a boy." This takes on the dimentions of a motif as Mary repeatedly describes her struggle to survive in a man's world. Ida's line, "I want you to imagine me as a ballet dancer," not only served to tell audiences of what she wanted to become, but also was a line that affixed her to a faithful image, for she applies the same choreographic considered sensitivity to all her relationships.

Since we were not dealing with plot in either script, but rather with development of character, it was important for us to develop a variety of techniques that would reveal as much as possible in as little time as possible.

We often placed a childhood incident, which helped to explain some personality trait, next to or woven in and out of an adult experience. Thus:

Ida: My boss told me I would be getting a raise and I looked him right in the eye and said I do not want a raise and will not accept a raise until my girls in the keypunch room get a raise.
Madeline: When we were little, you downed a boy.
Ida: Right in the snow band. He had thrown a snowball and hit a girl right in the back of the head.
Madeline: You just grabbed him and threw him down.
Ida: Me right on top of him and banged his head up and down.
Madeline: Big kid, too.
Ida: So I looked my boss right in the eye and they got their raise.

As this illustrated, we didn't develop our people chronologically. Rather, we placed their experiences in juxtaposition, regardless of time or place. Ida, as a child, is like Ida, as a woman, with a less refined way of operating perhaps, but with the same personal stamina. To couple like experience was natural and economical.

Since the scripts had to flow and transfer from one person to another and one topic to another with rapidity, we interwove indi-

vidual incidents thematically as well:

Lou: My life has been a continuity in stone. I learned from my father; he learned from his.
Doug: One morning I woke my son up...
Lou: And he learned from his.
Doug: He was looking out of the window. We were in the bathroom, and he said, "Daddy, there's a swael." I looked out of the window, and it was a squirrel.

The above deals with different father-son relationships that existed at different places and times. Lou is the son in his excerpt; Doug is the father in his.

We used the repetition of significant lines as a transitional element, not only to highlight something that had been previously stated, but also to indicate something about to happen, even in someone else's life. Martha, analyzing her life in retrospect, says that she would do just as she had always done and asks everyone, "Now does that make any sense?" Mary enters and states that her husband died in '47. Martha restates, in a more subdued tone, "Now does that make any sense." This allows Martha a moment of introspection, increases the impact of Mary's revelation, provides the script with a transition, and gives us a more heightened moment dramatically.

Since we had transcribed very little actual dialogue from the "Old Age" interviews, we incorporated a technique to create a sense of dialogue. We had various people assume a persona, role in another person's life. This additional voice helped recreate the actual experience and simplified what otherwise would have been extremely difficult monologues, which would have required the performer to make enormous emotional transitions. Reacting to a persona, the performer was able to recreate a moment in his or her life and give us a more honest portrayal.

Structurally, the first third of the "Old Age" script deals

with universalities: dreams, childhood, adolescence, marriage. We wanted each member of the audience to think: "They're just like me... credible people with real feelings." Once we had crossed the credibility gap, we were free to present their attitudes, their individual work lives, their special places in the world with the certainty that they would be accepted. We returned to the universalities of aging and death at the end of the script. Aging and death are inevitabilities that most of us choose to ignore. We placed these two sections at a climactic moment in the script because our people demonstrated in a mixture of fear, regret, expectancy, and determination that aging is not a pit stop before dying. Our ten people over sixty affirm life, all life. So they end the script with "I play the Kazoo." "Stand on my own two feet." "Make a difference." For what else are these but variations of being alive. Alive not because they are special, but because they are human.

As Dr. Hartman mentioned, the disabled population deals more substantially than the elderly population with public institutions and agencies: vocational rehabilitation and the social security administration. This coupled with the fact that the terms of this year's grant dictated that we deal with public policy issues more directly, presented us with a different challenge: how to present each individual in human terms, while reflecting his experiences with public policy in a dramatic way. To help us meet this challenge, we developed a role for an actor whose function would be to assume various persona: portray a judge, a voc rehab counselor, a friend, in short all the peripheral roles in the personal experiences we chose to use in the script. In addition, this actor would provide us with more fluid transitions, with a greater flexibility in dealing

with social commentary, and with a professional security for covering lines and developing our dramatic moments.

Since we had less people to deal with and more complete information, we created monologues, dramatic portraits, for each that established the person, the handicap, and his attitude towards the handicap, as in the following:

Mark: King of the Mountain, we'd always play. I even tried to play hopscotch. I'd get one leg to move, but my brace leg would lag behind. I tried marbles, too. I had the best fingers for marbles. Really strong fingers. And a cute smile. That's why I was poster child for the March of Dimes. I had polio. I was a smiling little kid on that poster.

Molly: Freckled face probably?

Jim: Dimples?

Actor: What about a beard?

Mark: I had a lot of freckles back then. I won a prize three years in a row for most freckles. I still have back home three blue ribbons pinned on Emmet the Clown.

Actor: Here's Mark trying to talk again.

Mark: I think the kids said that, you know. I've always felt just sort of less. Saying why couldn't I be like that. My nickname was Flub. I've been fairly comfortable with the personality I have, and I don't see a need to change. Then, lots of times, I do see a need to.

Actor: Why do you limp like that? Do you have a broken leg?

Mark: Why should kids ask that. They're kids. It just sort of puts me on the spot. I don't really want to talk about it. I'm stuck on a word. I have awful stomach pain. Everything's so tight and it closes right up. When I finally get the word out, I feel embarrassed that I went through all that. Feel sort of bad for the other person. It's just like throwing a wall up in front of people. They'll look away from me. One look at you and ah...they probably wish that they hadn't said anything or brought it up. I would have gotten involved with so much more. Hunting, fishing. I could have been more dad's pal, buddy. I never talk about what might have been. Getting into trouble all the time, playing sports, having a lot of friends. This is a boy.

Following the monologues, the script deals with our people's experiences with society's attitudes towards their disabilities. This section culminates in a repetition of significant lines heard earlier in the script, each of which reflects cruelty or a reaction to it, supplied by the actor who echoes names and insults each had been subjected to:

June: I'd sit on my swing and swing away dreaming in the clouds, how I could just swing up and disappear.
Actor: What's wrong with her?
Frank: And no one understood. My mother, my father, no one.
Actor: Hunchback.
Mark: My nickname was Flub.
Actor: Here's Mark trying to talk again.
Pat: Don't call me deaf and dumb. Just deaf.
Actor: Dummy.
Molly: What are we supposed to do, hide?
Jim: Do you need something?
Molly: I'd go up to my bedroom, put my head under the pillow and cry.
Frank: Many times I wanted to end it all. Many, many times.
Mark: I was drinking pretty heavily. I didn't have no girlfriend. I felt so alone. So unlike a man.
Frank: One day I was drinking. I said, "I'll drink myself to death." "That's a good death." They picked me up before I did.

After this section, the actor, having absorbed and internalized all their pain, ends up on his knees, whereupon the women gently help him up from the floor and place him on a stool center stage. The actor then states..."Some people understand...I understand...I do understand." But understanding does not come quickly; the desire to help is not always helpful. So the actor, well intentioned, offers, in a series of couplets, help of a most fantastic and idealistic nature. Each couplet is followed by experiences with an agency, an institution, a city, where help was offered or denied. For example:

You need disco therapy on a stage...
Electric scissors, a gilded cage...

June: They had me cutting rags. And my thumb would get all sore, so that I couldn't even use the scissors, and it would be bleeding and they would have to bandage it up.
Actor: Father had just died. Family was fighting. No one understood. Wanted to run away.
June: So where does he ship me to but Portland where nobody knows me, and I don't know them. They had to take me to the bus terminal like leading a dog onto something.
Actor: Goodwill.
June: I didn't want to cut rags. And I'd tell the counselor. I don't want to do that.
Actor: Well, that's what we think you can do.
June: What are they using the rags for. I couldn't figure that one out.

After the vignettes, the script deals with how they survived, what made them endure and change: human support and understanding, family relationships, self-determination and motivation.

Actor: It took a long time to change. And What caused the change?
Molly: Both the dogs were racing and running and I just plumped myself down in the field. You could hear the winds blowing. All kinds of different sounds.
Actor: Different sounds. Hey. How are you doing today?
June: I'd get on the bus; he drives one of the buses. He was always talking and I was always quiet. And I'd have a book in front of my face. After awhile, it took two years, that person really cares.
Molly: I was feeling real bad about not seeing. And all of a sudden Bob was there in my arms. We sat there for hours. I ate strawberries, too.
Mark: I found the woman I love and I want to have a family and make a living in this world. Nothing grand. Down to earth things I want.
Actor: Different sounds.
June: He didn't mention my handicap. He didn't even ask. He even asked me to marry him. Lucky.
Mark: So I've got them. So I'm happy.
Actor: Lucky.
June: Someone that accepts me the way I am.
Jim: It gets better every day. Or every other day.

After we had completed each script, our next concern was whether or not each cast could convey the interpretation and the overall dramatic structure. This hinged on their abilities as performers. None of them had performed before, but even if they had, can you imagine the difficulty of performing your own life and some of your most intimate moment in public? Those important moments that had had an effect, caused a change; vulnerable, naked moments that caused despair, hope, triumph, agony; moments that varyingly evidence strength, weakness, patience and ill-temper; moments when you looked in the mirror and could see nothing. Obviously, our approach to rehearsals had to be specialized.

Neither was an ordinary show. For awhile the casts sounded like an amateur company, reading lines they didn't understand, which was very strange. It seemed that handing people's own words back to them

was a distancing, intimidating thing to do. To create a reality to the presentations, we established a regimen of acting exercises: sensory recall, concentration, relaxation, vocalization, and in this year's case, memorization. Using these methods of preparation, we were able to introduce each to this new person, the performer. We coached the cast individually, asking them to relive their experiences and to transfer the resulting emotions to their performances. (Video of Frank in rehearsal)

To our advantage was the intimacy we had established during the interviewing phase. We expected and received a great deal from each cast: daily rehearsals for over a month, sometimes going through lunch into the afternoon. Their ability to learn, change, grow, concentrate, work long hours, and eventually deal with the difficulties of an extended tour, proved that they could adapt to the nature of performance. Being in the production in itself was a denial of the assumed weakness and rigidity old age and disability.

Just as our approach to the performer had to be specialized, so did our approach to movement. We established patterns, symbolically correlated movements, meant to supply a subtext to the script. Since we had no sets, we tried to make the movement visually stimulating, as well, by creating physical pictures. Since a substantial number of the disabled cast had severe mobility problems, we placed the actors in wheelchairs, providing us with fluidity of movement, while symbolizing the confinement most people associate with disability.

Following each rehearsal phase, the shows opened in Bangor and went on to a series of performances throughout Maine. The "Old Age" script was eventually adapted for television and "As Others See Us" is currently on a rather extended tour. In addition, a documentary of the process is being prepared.

There are so many moments to describe: a young, frustrated mother wanting to throw her baby out of the window; a woman sitting in a rocking chair, not knowing which way to turn; a woman losing six babies; another crying over her baby's death, but refusing to lament her husband's. So many moments: a man's consternation over being paralized; a woman's hunger after three days without food; a woman's desire to see her son dressed for his prom.

It is a dilemma to live. It's a mixture of heaven and hell to be human. Our people illustrate this dilemma, the paradox of living. After the results, the indignity, the horror, the limping, the stuttering, the crying, the abasement, the rejection, there is strength, sometimes quiet, but ever present, even if it's only based on the fragile hope that things will get better. And this strength is a resource, both human and economic, if only we had the ingenuity to take advantage of it.

Wherever we go, our casts demonstrate that neither they, nor anyone else, has to be confined to the stereotypes described in the openings of both shows. Our casts demonstrate that they are resources. The conclusion of "As Others See Us" returns to the issues of public policy, allowing the cast to ask a series of rapidly fired questions. This becomes one of our most dramatic moments because the issues are human and economic and are being addressed by our greatest resources.

Actor: Words. What are the right words?
Cast: Does the disabled population wish to associate with the nondisabled population?
Actor: Does the nondisabled population wish to associate with the disabled population?
Cast: Do you stay home?
Actor: If you were in a wheelchair, would you stay home?
Cast: What do you think is more important; what do you think you're supposed to do?
Actor: Or what you think they're supposed to do?

Cast: Are you grateful for what they gave you?
Actor: Are you grateful for what they can give you?
Cast: Would they hire a nondisabled person or me?
Actor: If you were disabled, would you hire you?
Cast: The laws...do they make your life accessible?
Actor: What do they do to yours?
Cast: Can we succeed?
Actor: Can they succeed?
Cast: What else can be done for us?
Actor: How far do you expect to go?
Cast: Who are we?
Actor: Do you see yourselves as others see you?

It's not the questions that are difficult. It's the answers.

Beyond the Image of Dependency: Affecting Public Policy

JoAnn Fritsche

The dramatic presentation, "As Others See Us," concludes with a series of questions to suggest that addressing the issues and questions raised in the drama is a public concern and societal responsibility in which the members of the audience must be engaged. The audience includes employers, educators, professionals in human service fields, municipal, state, and federal officials and - the largest constituent group - taxpayers who can and should exert political pressure, if necessary, to ensure that public laws and public agencies are operating on principles that are economically sound and also humane.

Tax dollars directly support public buildings, state and federal health and welfare agencies, educational institutions, public transportation, public recreational facilities and programs, and public communications systems. In many cases, nonetheless, such publicly supported systems are unnecessarily excluding disabled people.

One particular system - the Social Security System's Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program - sometimes functions as a work disincentive which, at times, has the impact of restricting disabled people's aspiration to contribute to their own economic support and also to contribute their skills and knowledge to the society. Many disabled people need some of the support services offered by the SSI program; the problem is not with the concept, but with some counterproductive administrative policies.

In short, publicly supported services and institutions which are excluding the disabled or otherwise creating additional handi-

caps for the disabled should be challenged by all of us, individually and collectively. Ten percent of the population is disabled. If we live long enough, all of us in this room will probably be disabled at some time in our lives. Indeed, if it is difficult for us to believe that ten percent of the population is disabled, it is very probably because unnecessary external barriers - architectural, transportational, educational, economic, and attitudinal barriers - are functioning to keep the disabled quite literally out of our sight and, therefore, outside of our awareness.

In an effort to counteract this lack of awareness, we are attempting through the dramatic presentation to bring many of the human, educational, and economic concerns of the disabled to the attention of those who make public policy, influence public policy, or could influence public policy, if aroused to make an effort to do so. The appeal is affective, as well as cognitive, and deliberately so.

People who are not intimately concerned about a disabled person may care little about the Rehabilitation Act, as a whole, or about Section 504, which requires that disabled children be "mainstreamed" in public education programs -- not segregated or isolated. After seeing "As Others See Us," the audience cares deeply that segregation and isolation in the schools have crippled Patty, June, Mark, and Frank emotionally and intellectually. Those four people were less handicapped by their own disabilities than by the policies of the schools and the attitudes and behaviors of school teachers and administrators.

Similarly, the dramatic presentation elicits human concern about how June and Frank feel about their seriously limited access to transportation. The affective appeal of the play is complemented

later, during the discussion period, by additional information, which points out public policy implications. For example, $1.3 billion could be saved annually in this country if more public transportation were accessible so that disabled Americans could accept employment. Even a slight modification in income tax regulations could help. Currently, disabled citizens who must rely on taxicabs to travel to and from work cannot claim the expense as a tax deduction, even though their taxes are helping to subsidize the public transportation which they cannot use because it is inaccessible.

The members of the audience are reminded that it is not enough to feel sympathy for the disabled individuals, nor is it enough to criticize or bemoan existing conditions. What are you willing and able to do to improve conditions for disabled people? That is the question which each audience and each individual in the audience is asked to consider. As a taxpayer will you write a letter to your Congressman to eliminate the work disincentives in the SSI program? Will you join or, if necessary, establish an advocacy group for the disabled? If you are a school board member or a teacher, what can you do to ensure that disabled children are successfully "mainstreamed"? If you are a rehabilitation counselor, or an administrator in the Bureau of Rehabilitation, what steps can you take to ensure that administrative policies and procedures in your agency do not result in your cutting off a disabled client's rehabilitation benefits prematurely, just because you are under great pressure to declare that you have successfully closed a certain number of cases each year?

The affective, as well as cognitive, appeal to taxpayers,

human service professionals, and local officials - including Mayors, City Managers, Town Council Members, and City Welfare Directors - is essential, even if a particular problem is apparently addressed by a federal law or a federal agency. In spite of laws requiring accessibility, equal opportunity, and mainstreaming for the disabled, federal, state, and municipal governments are still failing to provide the funding and other support necessary to ensure that disabled people are not denied opportunity and access to programs and facilities supported by public moneys. The dramatic presentation, "As Others See Us," is an effort to appeal to individual human minds and hearts and, thereby, eventually to move large numbers of people to urge reconsideration of public policies which have a negative impact upon the disabled.

This is only the third week of our twenty-four week effort to address public policy groups which impact upon the disabled. Therefore, it is still too early to determine what specific impact we will have on public policy and procedures. Nonetheless, the responses and evaluations we have received from the state Rehabilitation Association, from the state Municipal Association, from educators, employers, and human service professionals have given us reason to believe that oral interpretation is indeed an effective medium for raising public awareness and influencing public policy.

Oral interpretation is an extraordinarily effective means for enabling relatively powerless people to convey through an aesthetic form the significance of their experience and, thereby, demand that attention be paid to their experience.